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ABSTRACT

Economic change in China is coming about through wide-ranging economic reforms, is taking place at an unprecedented pace, and is affecting the lives of many of the inhabitants of the world's most populous nation. However, the attempts to reform the political process have been slow, like the attempts to reform the Chinese press. The Chinese press is the instrument of the Communist Party and a vital cog in the machinery of government. Changes in China's press system are taking place, mostly rhetorically rather than in practice. But a part of the rhetoric is driven by the realization that economic development and national modernization cannot continue to move forward without corresponding changes in other social sectors, including the press. There are two approaches to promote press reform. One advocates that the basic system and role of the press should be altered and would involve redefining Chinese press theory; while the other calls for relatively modest adjustments in the press' present operation and would involve affecting media performance through changes in content and improvement of news writing and presentation. Regardless of which approach is taken, it seems clear that problems arise in the discussion on press reform, such as whether an open economic system can exist in a closed press system and the impact on society as journalists become more independent and better educated. (Three notes are included, and 37 references are appended.) (MS)

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LOUD THUNDER, SMALL RAINDROPS:

THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND THE PRESS IN CHINA

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LOUD THUNDER, SMALL RAINDROPS: THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND THE PRESS IN CHINA

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Amid promising starts and ominous stutters, change in China today is taking place at an unprecedented pace. Most of the change is due to wide-ranging economic reforms. While material change is well documented, questions arise about other changes, such as political and journalistic. Using information from recent and predominantly Chinese-language documents, interviews with Chinese journalists and personal observations, the authors examine journalistic issues being discussed in the context of change for China's press system.

The theoretical framework is based on current theory of the press in China and is relatively straightforward. Built on Marxism and Leninism with adaptations from the Soviet system and tempered by distinctively Chinese interpretations, the press' purpose is to serve the nation's modernization program and to uphold the Chinese Communist Party. In exploring the nature and tenor of the press reform debate, the authors point to the enactment of press legislation as a fundamental concern. Discussion also focuses on a changing role for enterprise newspapers, development of a multi-tier press system and a re-examination of the concept of news values. Much of the discussion revolves around consideration of such basic notions as socialist freedom of the press, dialogue, social consultation, supervision by public opinion and open system.

The authors argue that changes are taking place in China's press system. The rhetoric is louder than the practice. But part of the rhetoric is driven by the realization that economic development and national modernization cannot move forward without corresponding changes in other social sectors, including the press.

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LOUD THUNDER, SMALL RAINDROPS:
THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND THE PRESS IN CHINA

Amid promising starts and ominous stutters, change in China today is taking place at an unprecedented pace. Most of the change has come about through wide-ranging economic reforms which "mark a watershed in the political economy of contemporary China" (Perry and Wong, 1). Various forms of contract and responsibility systems have displaced many state and collective entities, including, for example, people's communes. Open markets have encouraged private enterprise. Individual initiative is no longer a curse. Joint-venture arrangements with foreign firms have enabled the government to import new technology and know-how. The economic changes are widespread and affect the lives of many of the inhabitants of the world's most populous nation.

The economic changes are part of a concerted reform movement instituted shortly after the cultural revolution (1966-76) and led by China's paramount leader and "chief designer of reform," Deng Xiaoping. While material change due to economic reforms are well documented, questions arise about change elsewhere in the society, such as in the political realm or--relatedly, and the focus of this paper--the press.

The current theory of the press in China is relatively straightforward. Built on Marxism and Leninism with adaptations from the Soviet system and tempered by distinctively Chinese interpretations, the press' purpose is to serve the nation's "four modernizations": agriculture, industry, science and technology and national defense. Simultaneously the press is committed to upholding the Chinese Communist Party's four cardinal principles: socialism, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, leadership of the Party and dictatorship of

the proletariat. The Chinese press, in short, is the instrument of the Communist Party and a vital cog in the machinery of government.

In any social-political organization, the economic system is crucial. In Marxism, the economic system is the foundation upon which political and social institutions rest. As is often said in China, the economic base determines a society's superstructure while the latter serves and affects the former. Assuming the validity of this proposition, a question emerges in the midst of China's accelerated economic reforms: In what ways, if any, is the press being affected by change? In the absence of dramatic events, such as a proclamation that the press is no longer the mouthpiece of the Party, the temptation is to say that change in the press is nonexistent or negligible. Yet the relationship between an economic system and a communication system would dictate otherwise. Change in one sector should produce change in the other.

Using information gleaned from recent and predominantly Chinese-language documents, interviews with Chinese journalists and personal observations, we argue that changes are taking place in China's press system. Admittedly, the rhetoric is louder than the practice--"loud thunder but small raindrops," according to a Chinese adage. But a part of the rhetoric is driven by the realization that economic development and national modernization cannot continue to move forward without corresponding changes in other social sectors, including the press.

Historical and Theoretical Framework

China today is a major world power and is expected to assume an increasingly important role in world affairs. What happens in this

nation that accommodates nearly one-fifth of the world's population represents an intriguing social experiment in which fundamental theories of society clash with day-to-day events. This interplay between theory and application may help illuminate the interrelationship of a nation's economic system and its social institutions.

As Womack notes, the press situation is much more complex than merely asserting that the Party is in complete control and that journalists are government scribes (9). Nor is it accurate to argue, on the other hand, that in the final analysis the press is not all that different from other press systems. To be sure, the media are controlled by the Communist Party. As a collective, the press exemplifies Lenin's dictum that the press should be a collective propagandist, agitator and organizer. In examining the press of China (and, for that matter, any nation), it is necessary to exercise a kind of double peripheral vision: Vertical in terms of other developments in society, such as economic and political, and horizontal in terms of historical developments.

The literature about the press of China is relatively thin.1 Excellent scholarship exists on the use of the press in achieving national independence.2 Because of recent, rapid change in China, anything written tends to become dated quickly.3 In addition, much of the work, especially that of scholars in China, has been cast in a non-critical light. But there are growing exceptions. For instance, Qian Xin-pu, deputy director of the Journalism Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Science, criticizes the practice of using the press as a tool of propaganda and for its non-openness ("Origin and Development"). Another critic, from Hong Kong, is L. Chu, who writes

that despite China's change-oriented ideology, basic--really "basic"--change has not taken place (8-12). He asserts that Communism has become "ritualistic and superficial" and may even be a force resisting change because media reality does not square with the objective reality of what people experience.

Historically, four periods of the modern press in China can be identified.

The first began in 1921 when the Communist Party was established and ended in 1949 when Mao Zedung, standing in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, declared establishment of the People's Republic of China. The press was seen as a means to mobilize people for revolution. The first newspaper, called "Workers' Daily," was begun by the Party in 1921 with the intent of arousing public support for Marxism. In 1922 "Xiangdao" ("Guide") became the Party's first organ (Fudan University, 190, 199). Since then the Party has published numerous periodicals. The first radio station began operation in 1940. During this period mass media came to be integral components in the Party's management system. The impact of the press in influencing public opinion and winning people over was strikingly felt during those 28 years of civil strife. Obviously the Party attached great importance to the press. This tradition has continued to the present.

The second period--1949-65--saw China tilting toward the USSR. This was a time of consolidation of media and tightening control by the Party. The press was completely owned and operated by the Party. The primary purpose was to publicize Party policies and direct people toward the socialist cause. In the early phase, the present structure of the media was established. In 1956 came the campaign of "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend." As

was to happen on several occasions, this flourishing of free expression was short-lived. In the "Great Leap Forward" of 1958 the media projected the enthusiasm of the Party--a picture that did not conform to real conditions. Emerging in the top leadership was a view that a general cleansing and restoration of the revolutionary spirit were essential. The reawakening was to be known as the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution.

The third period--1966-76--was that of the cultural revolution, perhaps the "dark age" of Chinese journalism history. Control over communication was confused and chaotic. The number of official publications declined sharply. Local media tended to parrot the Central Party organ. The press was characterized by Party monopoly, single-minded expressions of opinion, politicization to the extreme, personal cultism of Mao and content exuding "big talk, empty talk and falsehood."

The fourth period--1976 to the present--is the era of China's open door policy and sweeping reforms. During this period the number of mass media has proliferated (Chen, et al., 4). This has come about in all communication sectors--film, books, video, advertising and public relations. For example, half of China's 1,776 newspapers--the figure excludes 415 unregistered newspapers--have been established since 1980 (Chen, et al., 4). The growth coincides with the government's modernization program.

Economic reforms began in late 1979 in the countryside, where 80 percent of the population lives. In 1984 the movement began spreading to the cities. Economic reforms have brought major changes in ideas and values. As the title of a popular book about the reforms pronounces, "To get rich is glorious" (Schell). With internal changes

has come importation of foreign technology and knowledge, for example, through the specially protected Special Economic Zones begun in 1980.

Economic changes have been difficult yet may be relatively easy compared to changes in the political system which is the next step. One constant theme of the Party leadership is the need to maintain stability. As Deng Xiaoping noted in Sept. 1986, "As economic reform progresses, we deeply feel the necessity for changes in the political structure. The absence of such changes will hamper the development of productive forces and the success of the four modernizations" (Huang, 15).

This has obvious implications for the nation's communication channels, which are an integral part of China's political configuration. Mao recognized early the role of the media in development. The "hundred flowers" campaign launched in spring, 1956, however, came to be seen as a threat to Party control and sparked an anti-bourgeois counter movement. Since then the pendulum of reform has swung between attempts to encourage initiative and maintenance of political control. Student demonstrations of 1986-87 followed by the anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign were a typical example of trying to maintain this delicate balance.

Thus, the current press reform is not the first in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. In 1942 the reform of the Party organ, "Liberation Daily," aimed to make the paper "a genuinely fighting organ of the Party" with more focus on the practical issues of the Communist-controlled areas, the importance of the masses and the operation of the paper by the whole Party. Western journalisic views and practices were criticized. In a sense, this first large-scale press reform helped shape the political stance of the Chinese press for

years to come. Another major attempt at press reform came in 1956 heralded by an editorial in the People's Daily, the organ of the Chinese Communist Party. The editorial called for expansion of news reporting, free discussions and debate and improved writing style. It asserted, "Newspapers are opinion institutions of the whole society" and "the common weapon and property of the people" (Yu, et al., 66). The thrust of this reform attempt challenged the press model of the civil war years. The reform movement ended prematurely with the anti-rightist campaign of 1957.

Present efforts at press reform bear similarities to the efforts of 1956. But there appear to be significant differences. The current movement is larger in scope and depth and, perhaps most importantly, in theoretical implications. With the profound economic reforms, the press, according to the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism, cannot remain what it has been. A change in societal material relations calls for necessary corresponding changes in the press. Only in this way can the press effectively carry out its role in the new political and economic environment.

Two main points should be emphasized. One is that change cannot be localized. That is, change in one sector produces change in other institutional areas, such as education, business, law, politics and communication, as well as in the broader contours of culture, especially values. This represents the vertical dimension referred to earlier. For example, changes in lifestyles and attitudes toward family--to cite only two instances--contribute toward a growing generation gap.

Second, as noted by L. Chu, the controlled change represents evolution rather than revolution (8-12). This is in accord with the goal of maintaining social stability.

Nature and Tenor of the Press Reform Debate

The press of China is part of the governance structure. Since attempts to reform the political process have been slow, press reforms likewise have been proceeding at a slow pace. Momentum to effect change in the political sphere has been gaining for some time. Last fall the 13th Party Congress for the first time formally issued a call for national political reform. Discussions which have been going on since the early 1980s to reform the press have begun anew. With the success of economic reforms, many Chinese journalism professionals and educators are calling for a formal resolution by the central government regarding press reform. Years of complaints about poor press practices have fueled discussions about the press and stimulated new thinking.

The theory of "facts serving politics" is under fierce attack because it provides excuses for distortion, exaggeration and fabrication. The practice of reporting primarily "good" news becomes a sensitive target of criticism. The argument that news reports should reflect the essence and main trend rather than phenomena themselves and that newspapers are a reflection of the planned economy based on public ownership has aroused hot debate. The traditional view that journalism is a tool of propaganda is also subject to increasing attack.

Meanwhile, numerous ideas and suggestions have sprung up to promote press reform. Among them are new concepts such as socialist freedom of the press, dialogue, social consultation, supervision by public opinion, open system and political transparency (a

"glasnost"-like phrase indicating greater openness in government and more aggressive press coverage by Chinese journalists). Two schools of thought have emerged. One advocates major reform, suggesting that the basic system and role of the press should be altered. The second approach calls for minor changes, that is, relatively modest adjustments in the press' present operation.

Major reforms would involve redefining Chinese press theory and changing the press system. According to Qian Xin-pu, the present system emerged when the Communist Party was preparing to take and consolidate power ("Origin and Development"). As a result, most newspapers have been Party organs, and newspapers themselves have been part of the Party apparatus. But, the argument goes, conditions have changed. The press is supposed to serve the drive toward modernization. What this means, continues Qian, is that the aims and functions of the Chinese press as well as the objective conditions in which it operates have been changed. Therefore, the reform should be an overhaul of the existing press theories, press policies and press system. But Qian stresses that the reform will require complex system engineering.

Sun Xupei of the Journalism Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Science also argues for basic reforms in the press system, including structure and management ("Press Reform Is," 10). In the past, there existed only the concept of the Party organs. Sun stresses that this concept now should shift to one of national journalism with a multi-tier, multi-type socialist press structure with the Party organs as the core.

As for minor reforms, these involve affecting media performance through changes in content and improvement of news writing and

presentation. The press system would remain basically intact. Fang Yan of the research section of the government-run Xinhua News Agency argues against fundamental reform ("Press Reform Is," 11). Stressing that some principles such as the Party's leadership should not and cannot be changed, he argues for strengthening the three functions of the Chinese press--top-to-down communication, bottom-to-top communication as well as general information transmission. As part of the reforms, Fang maintains, the press should reflect different voices and that initiatives of journalists should be given fuller play.

A gulf exists between the two approaches. But one thing the two positions hold in common is the need for changes in the Chinese press.

In the current debate, three main strands of press reform emerge:

--Combining two major social functions: Journalism represents a two-way avenue between the government and society. Thus, as Xu Yao-kuei, et al., argue, the press fulfills a political misson by serving as a mouthpiece of the government, that is, communicating information from the top downward (Xu, et al., 4). Additionally, the press plays a social role as a conveyor of public opinion to the government, that is, promoting communication of information from the public upward to government officials. The press reform debate suggests a delicate balancing of these two goals.

--Establishing a multi-tier press structure with the Party organ as the core: For a long time, Party organs have dominated the Chinese press. Xu, et al., assert that the basic role of the press is to communicate information which encourages a variety of publications with differing views and content aimed at different segments of the audience (Xu, et al., 5). Further, the press system must be sufficiently diversified to include non-Party and non-political media. The overall

aim, it appears, is to achieve a certain pluralism.

--Enacting press laws: Traditionally China has been a nation governed by people instead of laws. This applies to journalism. Since the founding of China in 1949, Party policies and directives have remained the rule for all publications to follow. As a result, if the Party erred, so did the press. Perhaps no better example exists than the Cultural Revolution when the press followed the "gang of four" in leading the nation into chaos. Xu, et al., argue that a press law for China should protect socialist freedom, combining protection and limitations, rights and obligations (Xu, et al., 8). Such a press law presumably would ensure that any news can appear in the press as long as it does not violate the Constitution, other laws or is detrimental to public interest. The argument is that socialist freedom of the press should mean that the mass media can enjoy relative independence and freedom while upholding socialism and serving both the Party and the people. In this vein, the press should have the right to criticize. A press law would emphasize self-discipline to promote social responsibility.

China owes much to the Soviet Union for its present press system. In the early 1950s China began adapting the Soviet press model, its guiding ideology, structure and management. With the model came what some now see as drawbacks. Sun Ru-gang points out several: failure to separate the Party from administration, concentration of the press and lack of press laws (Sun Ru-gang, 35). Press reforms, says Sun, should come about through a process of self-perfection and development of the socialist press system. The old model must be replaced by a new structure and provisions that would make the public genuine masters of journalism. He proposes a model called "the people's democratic

model." Major components would include: (1) In a socialist society, people should be masters of the mass media which should be rooted in and owned by the people; (2) the Party and the government should exercise leadership and management, which in turn should conform to the will of the people; (3) while enjoying press freedom, the Chinese press should fulfill its social obligations, adopt ethical standards of journalistic performance and be responsible to the public; (4) the Chinese press must follow the "objective" laws of journalism, that is, such universal conventions as striving to be accurate and assuming responsibility; and (5) the fundamental work of the Chinese press should be <u>from</u> the masses and <u>to</u> the masses.

As can be seen, the model stresses the importance and participation by the public in the operation of the Chinese press. Compared to the existing system of Party dominance of the press, the model no doubt represents some progress. But the model fails to delve into the interrelationships involving the public, the Party and the government. In general, the model does not break away from the threefold theory that the people, Party and government have the same fundamental interest as far as the press is concerned.

Selected Issues in the Press Reform Debate

The reform movement has sparked debate over several important journalistic concepts. Discussion of such subjects earlier was considered taboo. The debate itself reflects both growing concern over the need for press reform and possible directions. In a sense, the debate is cultivating a theoretical rationale for press reform. One of the most controversial issues is the concept of news.

News values--For a long time people in China have complained about the lack of news in Chinese newspapers. In particular, during the cultural revolution, content bore little relation to reality. The belief, first, was that news should serve politics and, second, that news stories should grasp the essence of events. This rationale has come under increasing criticism, though vestiges of "big talk, empty talk and falsehood" still appear in the Chinese press today. So it is no wonder that the concept of news has become a popular topic in Chinese journalistic circles. According to Hu, news cannot be separated from facts, but the two are not identical (Hu, 31). News reflects the changing status of things and events with emphasis on any new situation, new fluctuations and new tendencies. News is something which the audience does not know but wants to know. Excavating such news is a complex process influenced by social and cultural factors as well as journalistic professional conventions.

In the current debate about news two opposing views have dominated. One holds that news value refers to the traditional professionally-oriented values of reporting events. Thus, criteria for the relative importance of news become proximity, timeliness, prominence and consequence. Journalists become the primary news determiners. The other approach to news value considers audience receptivity and possible social effects. Opponents of the former label the approach "mechanical materialism." Opponents of the latter call it "subjective idealism."

Hu argues that both approaches are simplistic (Hu, 30). He sees news as a multi-dimensional, multi-tier concept rooted in facts but superseding the boundary of facts. Thus, newsworthiness of events is determined by the degree of importance, interest and timeliness. But

news values also reflect the relationship between facts and other events. For example, the visit of the United States table tennis team to China in 1971 was much more than a routine sports story at the time. It was a significant diplomatic event. A similar visit by the current table tennis team today would hold little news value.

What is identified as news, continues Hu, will vary with time and environment (Hu, 31). In the process, news is influenced greatly by journalists--their political sensitivity, knowledge, interview technique, expressive ability, intellect and judgment. At the same time Hu argues that news values exist in the relations between facts and the audience, political parties and society as a whole. Thus, in judging news, reporters must weigh the interests of the audience, society and the Party.

Zhou Ji of the Shanghai TV station believes that news values can be subdivided into six areas: political, policymaking, timeliness, educational, appreciative and social (Zhou, 22-23). Zhou argues that at present too much emphasis is placed on economic values while timely and social values receive insufficent attention. The press reform, he holds, should permit the possibility of striking a balance among the six values.

Enterprise Newspapers--Economic reforms have spurred communication not only among various business enterprises but also within enterprises. As a result, the number of so-called enterprise papers has mushroomed. By the end of 1985 China had 361 enterprise publications, constituting 20.3 per cent of the nation's total number of newspapers (Chen, et al., 4). Enterprise newspapers continue to flourish. Issues associated with the emergence and rapid development of these newspapers have become part of the press reform debate.

Traditionally enterprise newspapers have been regarded as specialty newspapers for they are usually run by more or less specialized economic entities. Content generally is tied to the particular production activity or enterprise specialty. Readership commonly consists of managers and staff members of business enterprises. In another sense, the publications may be regarded as mini-Party organs based in a particular business organization.

Unlike private businesses in the West, many enterprises in China are both production units and social communities. Employees live within a compound which often has its own elementary and middle schools, health care facilities, hospitals, restaurants and shops. Most enterprises in China, in fact, resemble mini societies. In light of changes in recent years, Ma argues that the newspapers should focus attention beyond the enterprise and become more comprehensive (Ma, 35-36). This is necessary for several reasons. One is that with the progress of economic reforms enterprises have had to extend their concerns beyond production to include such matters as distribution, exchange and consumption. Thus, the social link of the enterprise has been broadened. Another reason Ma cites is that the nation's economic reforms and the policy of opening to the outside world have forced enterprises to respond to the new informational needs. Yet another reason is that changes in the lives of enterprise workers have resulted in a demand for knowledge and information that goes beyond mere economic news.

Yang proposes a number of changes in enterprise newspapers that would significantly alter their function (Yang, 38-40). In line with the open market, newspapers would be encouraged to adopt a more open stance and become more independent. The enterprise director--rather

than the Party leadership--would assume publication responsibility. Newspapers would place less emphasis on political propaganda and more emphasis on information transmission. Greater stress would be placed on knowledge since market forces compete not only for product and service quality but also for talented and educated personnel.

Overall, enterprise newspapers would assume the characteristics of a general newspaper designed to serve the growing informational needs of its readers. Multiple functions would include imparting information and knowledge, reflecting society, guiding public opinion and educating the people. Such goals, according to Chen, would require developing appropriate journalistic professional standards (Chen Guanyuan, 40).

Press Legislation--Perhaps the most widely-agreed-upon issue in the press debate is the need for a press law. Without effective press legislation, it is argued, the rights of journalists cannot be protected, they cannot fulfill their obligations, administrative interference cannot be prevented and supervision by public opinion through mass media cannot be achieved. Progress toward enactment of a press law has not caught up with the rhetoric. Discussions have been taking place since the late 1970s, and the actual drafting of legislation began in 1984. A report last December indicated a draft dealing with basic principles might be forthcoming in 1988 ("Draft of Press Law," 2); however, indications are that the draft legislation may be delayed even further ("Press Legislation Experiences," 12). Issues such as rights and obligations of journalists are being studied. Zhang you-yu, a well-known jurist in China, holds that protection of press freedom ought to be the foundation of press legislation ("Protection of Press," 4).

To understand the need for press law, historical context is essential. As noted earlier, today's press is rooted in the Party papers during the revolutionary wars between 1921 and 1949. After the People's Republic was declared in 1949, China's domestic situation changed but the practice of Party paper dominance continued. Although all sorts of groups--occupational, political, governmental, enterprises and special interest--publish newspapers, all must follow the editorial line set for the Party papers. It is a pluralistic system in name only. The voices sing a uniform tune. Independence is virtually nonexistent. Private newspapers are strictly banned. What has resulted is a unique characteristic of the Chinese press: governance by Party instead of law. Today there seems to be growing sentiment to end the Party's complete monopoly of the press and to write legislation to protect the press.

A recurring theme among those arguing for a relaxation of Party control is the need to replace Party supervision of the press with public opinion. This is a point made by Li Ji, editor-in-chief of Workers' Daily ("Time Is Ripe," 5). Sun Xupei adds that the current Chinese press system breeds uniformity: "As a result, all papers said similar things with a similar tone, causing a virtual uniformity of public opinion" (Sun Xupei, B11/8). He says the essential first step for change is the adoption of press legislation.

For a long time the Chinese press has served as a tool for certain power groups. A slogan once popular in China was "the press as an instrument of the proletarian dictatorship." Whenever the press intended to publish something counter to the power group's interests, administrative interference and censorship occurred. Li Senhua, deputy director of the Shanghai People's Radio Station, believes that passing

a press law can help change the situation ("Time Is Ripe," 5).

Proponents of press legislation believe there is a role for both Party and independent newspapers. What would emerge is a socialist freedom of the press. Socialist press freedom would expand the arena of journalism by giving a voice to non-Party publications. Such freedom would still mean media adherence to the principles of socialism. The Party would continue to play a dominant role, but feedback would be utilized to involve public opinion in governance. One of the chief aims of press legislation is to develop and protect socialist freedom. Sun suggests such legislation could protect the rights of journalists and the public to present their views and offer criticism. In addition, legislation could help prevent abuse of freedom of the press as a result of slander or false accusation.

China has had a tradition of a weak legal system. This, along with the sheer difficulty of undoing decades of entrenched practice, makes the task of developing press legislation formidable. Li Zu-xin, a member of the press law drafting committee, stresses that the development of press legislation must be part of the nation's overall political and legal reform ("Press Reform Is Part," 11). The objective of the press law, Li says, is to work out details reflecting freedom of speech and rights of citizens as outlined in the Chinese Constitution and to clarify relationships of government to the journalistic community. The purpose should be to build an information system that would more effectively serve China politically, economically and culturally.

China's press law, according to Li, should reflect these general principles: (1) non-administrative interference, (2) freedom of publications to ensure the ability of citizens to do whatever is within

the boundary of the law, (3) supervision by public opinion to allow full participation of the public in political affairs, (4) openness; and (5) abolition of censorship prior to publication and enforcement of penalty for libel, slander, bribery, leaking state secrets and treason ("Press Reform Is Part," 11-12).

An Inconclusive Conclusion

Whither goest China? And can the press be far behind?

The questions are not new. Yet all too often the answers have been the same. Now, with the impact of the economic reforms affecting all sectors of Chinese society, the questions are being asked anew. Change, driven by economic reforms, is occurring rapidly and widely. There appears to be no going back. The impact of the changes raises intriguing theoretical issues about China's press system. For the nation's communication system to effectively support national goals of modernization and economic development, basic questions arise concerning the long-accepted notions of the role of the press. Linked tightly to politics and heavily controlled by the Party, the press must recreate itself if it is to continue to serve the nation. Modernization of the Chinese communication system would appeaer to be a necessary handmaiden to the four modernizations. What is--or ought to be--the role of a press in a nation engaged in unshackling its economic base? According to the tenets of Marxism and Leninism, an economic system determines a society's superstructure. The superstructure--of which the communication system is a part--then serves the economic system. Can an open economic system exist in a closed press system? Theoretically the answer would appear to be no. And practically the Chinese appear to be going about the task of making the necessary

institutional adjustments to accommodate an expanding market system.

Another theoretical issue prompted by this overview of the current debate about press reform in China involves the impact on China's press of the nation's opening up to the rest of the world. That is, the focus here has been primarily on internal economic affairs. China also has aggressively pursued economic development in the international arena. Perhaps in studying institutional relationships less emphasis should be put on a nation's domestic environment and more emphasis on the external environment. Janos refers to this move from national to global conceptualization as a significant and necessary "paradigm shift." He argues that the global paradigm does not "destroy the validity of the old paradigms but undermines their claims to universality, is characterized by global consciousness, global division of labor, global system concept and idea flow from society to society and from continent to continent" (pp.149-154).

To date, the main change concerning the press in China is the extent and vigor with which reforms are being discussed. The need for change is deeply felt. But the direction and nature of the reforms are still at a fragmentary conceptual stage. Notwithstanding the case of Liu Binyan, perhaps China's most internationally visible journalist who was removed from the Party early in 1987 following widespread student demonstrations, journalists and journalism educators and other leaders are increasingly discussing press reform issues. The debate is taking place in many Chinese newspapers and periodicals, and this paper has tried to reflect the tenor of the debate and highlight some of the main points. By and large, advocates of press reform adopt one of two stances. Some favor a major overhaul, redefining the role of the press and its relationship to government. Others call for more modest

changes, such as changing news content and writing style. In the process, basic journalistic issues are being discussed, ranging from news values to the role of enterprise newspapers and, especially, the need to develop press laws.

Press changes in and of themselves raise interesting questions. If the press gains more independence, how will responsible performance be assessed? How will ethics be handled? How will the field of journalism evolve professionally? What will be the impact on society as journalists become more independent and better educated?

In considering the prospects for press reforms in China, there is the danger of overreacting in one direction or the other. On the one hand, the inclination is to dismiss the debate as rhetorical exercise with experience suggesting reforms will never get beyond the talking stage. At the other extreme, one may be tempted to make too much from the talk about press reform and think that major change is imminent. Both positions, in the view of the authors, would be unfounded. Perhaps the most realistic assessment is that the debates portend change. Whether it is positive or negative depends upon one's perspective. It doesn't have to be either.

NOTES

1 For a recently-compiled bibliography of mass communication in China, see Johnson, "China: A Mass Communication Reading List." We will cite only several particularly useful works here: those of Godwin C. Chu as well as those of Liu; Howkins; the classic by Lin; a section in Townsend and Womack (pp. 196-257); and Frederick T. C. Yu.

2 See especially the volume edited by Chu and Hsu, and Liu, Communications.

3 Among popular recent works devoting significant attention to China's mass media are Bonavia, Butterfield and Mathews.

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